



FOOD SECURITY AND MINIMIZING POSTHARVEST LOSS: MARKETS, APPLIED RESEARCH, AND INNOVATION

February 19, 2013

Co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, the Office of Global Food Security, and the Foreign Service Institute

Summary Report

On February 19, 2013, the State Department hosted the roundtable event “Food Security and Minimizing Postharvest Loss: Markets, Applied Research, and Innovation.” The roundtable brought together over 160 representatives from the foreign diplomatic corps, U.S. government agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and international organizations to discuss solutions to postharvest loss in the developing world. Thirty country representatives attended, including several ambassadors. The webcast portion of the event brought in a virtual audience of more than 4,200 participants from around the world.

Objectives:

1. To better understand the impact of postharvest loss on food security in low-income countries.
2. To identify promising research, innovations, and business practices that can help stem postharvest loss.
3. To elevate the profile of postharvest loss prevention initiatives across the for-profit, government, and non-profit spheres and identify new areas for collaborative solutions.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Postharvest loss is collective food loss all along the food production chain, from harvest and handling to storage and processing to packing and transportation. Each year, roughly one-third of the food produced in the world goes to waste, which is equivalent to 1.3 billion tons – a figure that includes retail and consumer food waste as well. The causes of postharvest loss are complex and vary depending on the weather, region, and crop, but common culprits in the developing world include a lack of proper storage, lack of appropriate transportation, and lack of detailed information on where and how food is lost.

In order to address this serious problem, the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, the Office of Global Food Security, and the Foreign Service Institute co-



sponsored the roundtable, “Food Security and Minimizing Postharvest Loss: Markets, Applied Research, and Innovation.” Over 160 representatives from the foreign diplomatic corps, U.S. government agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and international organizations discussed the issue of postharvest loss, focusing on Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

HIGH LEVEL SUPPORT

Robert Hormats, then Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, delivered the keynote speech, highlighting the need to examine postharvest loss from a local environment perspective and to harness the power of technology and innovation to find solutions. He noted that governments must adopt policies that encourage greater investment in postharvest storage and distribution network infrastructures. These policies, Hormats argued, should aim at ensuring both broadly based benefits for farmers and consumers and profitability for investors.

Jose W. Fernandez, then Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, delivered opening remarks, describing the magnitude and complexity of the problem and pinpointing some of the many causes of postharvest loss, ranging from poor infrastructure to lack of financing for food storage equipment and technology. He stressed that there is no silver bullet solution, so we must all do our part in tackling the blight of lost and wasted food and breaking the cycle of hunger.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS AND FOCUS AREAS

On the first panel session, then Assistant Secretary Fernandez was joined by Bill Hudson, CEO of the Global Cold Chain Alliance; Philippe Villers, President of GrainPro; Bruce McNamer, President and CEO of TechnoServe; and Margaret Enis Spears, Director of the Office of Markets, Partnerships and Innovation in USAID’s Bureau for Food Security, for a discussion on the role of the private sector in addressing postharvest loss. Panelists discussed challenges to scaling up postharvest loss solutions such as lack of attention and funding, barriers to trade, and lack of policy incentives. Questions from the audience focused on how to overcome financial barriers, and ways to mediate the imbalance in technology and infrastructure between the developing and developed world.

In the second panel, participants discussed ways that stakeholders and institutions could transition from research to implementation, focusing on cost-effective best practices for reducing



postharvest loss. A number of areas were covered, including better documentation of postharvest losses and improved access to data, the need for improved policy environments for prioritizing postharvest loss reduction, and the need to address gender and socio-economic impediments.

Four breakout sessions were held:

- **Finance, Markets, and Investment:** In order for financing to be sustainable in the long term, there must be a path from non-profit grant-based funding to for-profit investment opportunities. Participants discussed government policy measures that are needed to improve the effectiveness of financing, such as reducing import duties on agricultural equipment and encouraging indexed insurance and risk guarantees.
- **Perishables and Cold Chain:** Access to a temperature controlled supply chain (cold chain) and investment in cold chain infrastructure varies significantly by country and by region. Investment, certification, risk assessment, and cold chain development were identified as solutions by participants. There are a number of existing projects and technologies, large and small, expensive and cheap underway depending on the product, region, and need of producers. Participants discussed the need to focus on village-level, provincial or regional solutions.
- **Non-Perishables:** Food storage and postharvest loss is as much a food health and safety concern as an economic issue. Participants discussed the need to build trust with producers and farmers as well as the need for government support for policies that address food safety.
- **Bridging Research with Implementation:** In addition to using community-based knowledge, culturally accessible education and hands-on training are needed to better implement regional and local solutions. Participants addressed the need for three avenues of capacity building: technology; infrastructure; and institutions.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For additional information, find the Office of Agriculture, Biotechnology, and Business Affairs at <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/tpp/abt/postharvest/index.htm>, and Feed the Future at <http://www.feedthefuture.gov/>.